

Symington Begins Inquiry On U.S. Commitments

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 30—Senator Stuart Symington (Dem., Missouri), began special subcommittee hearings today on America's overseas commitments. The inquiry will be closed, with emphasis on secrecy to protect the witnesses.

Details of the hearings will be made public after the transcript has been edited to eliminate material that could affect the national security.

Symington and his seven-member ad hoc subcommittee on United States security agreements and commitments abroad will seek information not usually available through official channels from the executive branch.

Instead, the special inquiry will hear from lower-level Government employees who are not bound by the public relations considerations that sometimes restrict their superiors in talking to congress.

Witnesses are described only as being from responsible Government agencies. It is thought that they include employees not only of the Departments of State and Defense but also of the Central Intelligence Agency and even of the supersecret National Security Agency.

The country-by-country study, starting with the Philippines, is expected to explore, for example, corruption and anti-American sentiment in the Philippines rather than the usual public affirmations of friendship and cooperation.

Hearings on Laos, scheduled for two weeks from now, are expected to explore the largely-secret war there, including its implications for possible deeper United States involvement.

Although President Richard M. Nixon said last week that the United States was engaged only in aerial reconnaissance and certain other activities that would not detail, published reports have said that 300 Americans under the CIA are directing a special force of 12,000 tribesmen and Thais wearing Royal Lao Army uniforms to fight Communist-led forces, including North Vietnamese.

U.S. planes are said to be engaged in bombing support of ground troops in areas far away from the Ho Chi Minh trail, the system of supply routes from North Vietnam into South Vietnam.

Hearings on Thailand and other countries will come later. They will cover most of the Far East except for Vietnam.

In an opening statement,



Senator Stuart Symington

Symington said: "The principal thrust of these hearings will be to build a detailed record of the security understandings, and the United States military forces, facilities and programs overseas which constitute the current complex series of relationships with foreign governments that have been labeled commitments."

After the inquiry, he said, public hearings will be held to discuss with officials of the Departments of State and Defense, as well as selected public witnesses, the foreign policies and commitments of the United States.

Witnesses in the initial inquiry were selected in part by members of the subcommittee staff

in a seven-month preliminary inquiry. They spent July and August touring the Far East.

Symington said that the Nixon Administration had co-operated in bringing back to this country "those officials stationed overseas who, in the opinion of the staff, are best able to describe United States activities in specific countries."

Symington hopes to have declassification of the testimony handled by a referee acceptable to both the subcommittee and the Administration. That was the system used in the hearings on the recall of Gen. Douglas MacArthur and other inquiries.

He has said that he wanted to make sure that any deletions were solely for reasons of national security.

He expressed the conviction that most Americans want Congress "to show even more concern with respect to foreign policy and defense policy" and ask for a new openness in the handling by this Government of United States activities abroad.

"At times it is necessary for a nation to pause at some crossroad to reassess the way it is traveling, the direction it is seeking to take; and I believe that now we are at such a crossroad," Symington said.

Other members of the subcommittee are Senators J. William Fulbright (Dem.), Arkansas, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee; Mike Mansfield of Montana, Senate Democratic majority leader; John J. Sparkman (Dem.), Alabama; George D. Aiken (Rep.), Vermont; John Sherman Cooper (Rep.), Kentucky, and Jacob K. Javits (Rep.), New York.

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Symington Subcommittee

Senate Unit Opens Review Of Overseas Bases Today

A Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee begins a series of hearings today that could pave the way for a sharp cut-back in U.S. military bases around the world.

The subcommittee, headed by Sen. Stuart Symington D-Mo.), will hear three military men and a diplomat discuss behind closed doors the rationale for the six bases that the Pentagon maintains in the Philippines.

Ultimately, Symington's unit plans to scrutinize all installations in the Far East, except Vietnam, and those in the Mediterranean and NATO countries.

Symington and his staff have been guarded about their purpose. In a statement issued on the eve of the inquiry, the senator said only:

"The principal thrust of these hearings will be to build a detailed record of the security understandings and the United States military forces, facilities and programs overseas which constitute the current complex series of relationships with foreign governments that have been labelled 'commitments.'"

However, Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), chairman of the parent committee, Symington and others have spoken out elsewhere often enough to make clear the principal preoccupations of the inquiry.

There is a growing congressional belief that the military is dictating foreign policy rather than supporting it.

Secondly, there is a widespread concern that the creation of bases and commit-

ments has undermined congressional oversight of foreign policy and weakened Congress' constitutional prerogative to declare war.

Finally, there is a conviction that much of the military apparatus maintained abroad is a waste of men and money.

If the subcommittee succeeds in convincing the public that these beliefs are well founded, the pressure to reduce bases and commitments could become irresistible.

The opening round of hearings will bring to the witness stand Lt. Gen. Francis C. Gideon, commander of the 13th Air Force base at Clark Field, near Manila; Rear Adm. Draper C. Kaufman, commander of naval forces in the Philippines; Lt. Gen. Robert H. Warren, deputy assistant secretary for military assistance and sales and James Wilson, minister at the embassy in Manila.

Gen. Warren has taken over the task formerly performed by Henry Kuss, the Pentagon's celebrated arms salesman. Presumably, he will be questioned about whether arms sales and military aid contribute to American security, the extent to which they preserve unpopular regimes in power and whether they embolden smaller nations to behave belligerently towards their neighbors.

Apart from Clark Field, the principal American installations in the Philippines are the 7th Fleet's base at Subic Bay and the naval air station at Sangley Point. According to the Defense Department, 30,000 Americans in uniform man these and three smaller installations.

A 1951 treaty leases the bases for 40 years, a time span that is now a sore point in Manila. The agreement says both nations recognize that an armed attack in the Pacific endangers their safety and pledges that they will meet the "common danger" in accordance with their constitutional processes.

After a week on the Philippines, the subcommittee will turn to the explosive American involvement in Laos. Those hearings will start on Oct. 13. By then, the investigators hope to have a printed version of the Philippines inquiry cleansed of classified matter and available for public release.

The Symington unit will continue this technique of private hearings followed by sanitized transcripts for Laos, Thailand, Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan and South Korea. Its two investigators, Walter Pinchus and Roland Paul, have also examined American bases in Greece, Spain, Turkey, Italy, Portugal and the Azores. They plan in time to inspect those in other NATO countries as well.

Symington has said he will hold some public hearings, apparently with high-ranking officials, after he has made his record in executive session. However, yesterday Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) urged him to open all his hearings. Goldwater said "there is no reason for secrecy in questions involving treaties which were openly ratified by the Senate."

The subcommittee contends that lower-level, operating officials will talk more frankly if they are heard in private.